

DAIRY HERD IMPROVEMENT

I attended an Aggie basketball game a few days ago. While there I observed that many take Aggie ballgames quite seriously. It was enlightening, even entertaining, to study people getting caught up in the excitement of the game. I met several of my dairy friends at the Spectrum and know that many have season tickets. Experience has shown we can never schedule an Extension meeting without first consulting the Aggie basketball schedule. If given a choice between entertainment and education, it seems our targeted audience usually prefers entertainment.

I often wonder how any given ballgame can be so crucial. We always have pre-game shows, play by play coverage during the game and endless calls and analysis during the post-game show. Good coaches do careful pre-game scouting, methodically lay out a game plan, make necessary adjustments during the game and use the unique talents of any given player throughout the game. Afterwards they spend countless hours reviewing game video strategizing how their team can be more competitive in the next game.

The statistics that are recorded are almost superfluous, but good coaches know them and use them. I don't claim to know as much about basketball as the typical reader, but I do know that Individual points, rebounds, assists and turnovers only tell part of the story. Additional stats include assist-to-turnover ratios, shooting percentages (from the field, in the paint, three point range, free throw line), total minutes played, games averages, season averages, season highs and a host of additional stats. No coach would consider managing their team without the disciplined use of such statistics. By using statistics and carefully watching their players, good coaches maximize talents and seize opportunities, thus enjoying success in their chosen professions.

I am often mystified when dairy producers, who have several hundred thousand dollars - even millions, invested in their cows and facilities, don't systematically collect useful data on their dairy cows. State statistics show that only 50 percent of Utah dairy producers regularly collect performance data on their dairy cows. Another 20 percent collect production and performance data periodically, but roughly 30 percent simply produce milk without really knowing which cows are performing well and which cows are loafing.

The logical means of collecting such data is through the Dairy Herd Improvement Association (DHIA). A century of success shows that herds regularly tested by DHIA supervisors have progressed at a much faster rate than non-DHIA herds. Today's DHI records still provide tried and true milk production, component and SCC information, reproduction data and lactation curves, but milk testing options and frequency are almost endless. DHI tested herds are provided timely information to make profit-enhancing decisions. I am convinced that every serious dairy producer should have their herd enrolled in the DHIA program.

Length of this article will not allow a full listing of available reports, but a few examples include the following: daily milk production, milk components, average pounds peaked, average 30-day change in production, average days in milk, average somatic cell score by stage of lactation, change in herd somatic cell score, herd turnover percentage, relative values, calving interval, interval between

breedings, services per conception, average age at first calving, cows expected to calve, peaks and persistency in lactation curves, and many more.

When it is time for cows to make a career change, reliable DHI data can be used to make educated culling decisions. DHI records can also help reveal metabolic problems in individual cows or within entire herds quickly and early before they cause serious economic impacts. Inverted fat/protein ratio is one example of early intervention before more severe symptoms appear. With tightening margins, it only makes sense to use every management tool available to guide decisions. If I were an Ag lender, I would want my borrowers to have the information that comes with regular DHI reports. In my way of thinking, the cost of not having the data far exceeds the reasonable cost of monthly testing.

Chris Tucker is the current manager of Rocky Mountain DHIA. He works under the direction of an elected Board of dairy producers who are characteristically blunt and honest in telling him how to be helpful to their industry. Producers who would like to visit with Chris about possibilities of using the resources of the DHIA lab can contact him at 797-3965 or 512-9123. You will find him pleasant to work with.

Current DHIA members are invited to our Cache County DHIA Awards dinner on February 19, at the Bluebird Restaurant. The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. with a great meal and recognition of members. Tickets are available from DHIA milk testers, county board members, or at the Extension office. We checked the schedule to be sure our banquet does not interfere with an Aggie basketball game. We hope you will plan on joining us.